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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2499
INFO RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY 0832
RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY 7386
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY 1309
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 1371
RUEHKU/AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY 0465
RUEHMK/AMEMBASSY MANAMA PRIORITY 0084
RUEHMS/AMEMBASSY MUSCAT PRIORITY 0151
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT PRIORITY 8291
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 2544
RUEHYN/AMEMBASSY SANAA PRIORITY 0262
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA PRIORITY 4036
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: ELAB EAID ECON EIND ETRD TS
SUBJECT: LABOR PROGRAMMING NEEDS IN TUNISIA

REF: STATE 200668

¶1. (SBU) Post welcomes reftel's request for input on labor
programming needs in the region. Tunisia has a strong labor
history pre-dating independence, and unions are active across
all sectors and throughout Tunisia. The General Union of
Tunisian Workers (UGTT), the sole labor confederation, is
well organized, relatively democratic and active
internationally. Labor-organized strikes are common in
Tunisia and often lead to improved conditions. Labor laws
are among the strongest in the region; indeed, they are
sometimes seen as an impediment to increased foreign and
private investment. Perhaps in recognition of the strength
and activism of the Tunisian labor movement, the Labor Union
of Arab Maghreb Workers, which is associated with the
five-nation Arab Maghreb Union (Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria,
Tunisia and Libya), is headquartered in Tunisia.

¶2. (SBU) Unfortunately, the relatively powerful Tunisian
unions are also vocal opponents of USG policies in the
region. Most, if not all individuals associated with the
UGTT have boycotted USG activities -- from meetings to
receptions to financing -- since the Iraq war began in 2003.
In recent weeks, union activists have publicly stressed their
strong anti-American and pro-Saddam leanings. While most
labor officials boycott embassy events, those who meet with
EmbOffs refuse to cooperate in any substantive way with the
USG.

¶3. (SBU) However, the UGTT and its associated unions enjoy a
strong historical relationship with American unions that
continues today. The AFL-CIO Solidarity Center has an active
technical cooperation program with the UGTT. Over the past
year, the regional Solidarity Center representative based in
Algiers has organized several programs in Tunisia. Given the
local environment and in order to maximize participation,
post strongly recommends any USG labor programming targeting
Tunisian participants be organized under the umbrella of
regional or international NGOs, such as the International
Labor Organization, the International Trade Union
Confederation and the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center.

¶4. (SBU) In terms of programming, Tunisian labor activists have stressed their interest in improving their organization of and outreach to youth and women, who are underrepresented in many sectors' unions. Labor is also focused on the impacts of globalization and the international trade environment, including retraining displaced workers and increasing competitiveness. Post believes local unions would benefit from programming focusing on the benefits of free trade -- to workers and consumers. Additionally, Tunisian unions are relatively apolitical (domestically) and thus could be educated on appropriate and constructive means of political activism, including lobbying.

¶5. (SBU) Post is already working with regional Solidarity Center representative Lorraine Clewer to organize two labor programs:

1) A session on Labor's Role in Politics, moderated by Clewer, for post's monthly Human Rights Roundtable Series (tentatively scheduled for February), and

2) A Solidarity Center regional program on Freedom of Expression to be hosted in Tunis in spring 2007 and potentially funded by a MEPI small grant.
GODEC